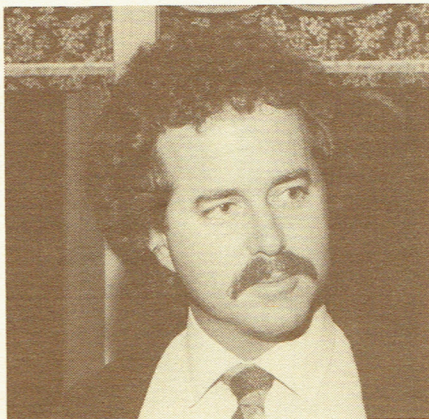


# LEN HILL AIMS CRITICISM AT TV NETWORK'S PRACTICES

by Stephen Bowlsby

As an independent producer who knows the business intimately from both sides, **Len Hill** is a man who genuinely cares that the industry work for everyone's good, particularly the public's. Indeed, at the CTAA May soiree, hosted by **Peter Bieler**, '72, Hill, who was once in charge of acquiring movies for ABC-TV, made these following criticisms.

For one, Hill attacked the notion that the networks are losing out to pay TV. Saying such an idea was a scam promoted by the networks themselves to aid their bid for deregulation, Hill also went on to assert that if the networks do lose out to pay TV, it's only because



John Williams

Len Hill

the public prefers the independent station that will program a well-known film without commercial interruption. Hill pointed to the networks' practice of airing untested films that are riddled with commercial breaks as an example of their conservative attitude. Focused only on minimizing risks, such networks, Hill said, are programming themselves to self-destruct.

Hill said he found such a practice "scary" since free television is crucial to the workings of a democratic society. In the networks' greedy push to deregulate, the "communal fire" aspect of free television will be undermined. Hill warned that while the networks think they can keep everything they have and grab for more, they'll be bankrupt in the long run. Additionally, ~~he also warned that~~ the resultant blandness of programming, caused by the networks' conservatism, ~~also~~ presents several dangers; one namely being that such blandness often makes violence on television more palatable.

Hill also went on to attack the practice of packaging fees for agents. He related a recent encounter over the rights to film a solar energy story in

which an agent was offered a packaging fee by another producer. This meant that the agent would make three percent of the license fee (up front) and three percent out of the first profits. Of course, when presented with such a lucrative deal, the agent would more than likely "sell five of his own clients down the river," and probably misrepresent their interests to involve them in such a project. In such a case, not only is a client misrepresented but everybody, including the public, loses.

One more peeve was film school. Film education has done a disservice to the industry, Hill said, by encouraging young filmmakers to go for making blockbuster features or pilots, instead of just being a professional. "George Lucas was the worst thing that ever happened to USC," said Hill. Rather, the best way to enter the industry is to write a spec episodic script. If you come up with a well-structured script, said Hill, any producer "will gobble you up."

Hill went on to talk about some of his own projects. Currently, Hill (whose past credits include producing, with Phil Mandelker, the TV movies *Mae West*, *Dreams Don't Die* and *Having '4 All*) is working on *Rivington Street*, a "multi-generational family saga." Max Cohen is writing a six to eight hour script that will tell in docudrama the story of the lives of the occupants of one house in New York over three centuries.

However, instead of going to the mini-series department, *Rivington Street* is being developed for ABC as a "close ended" series, one that has a built-in ending after perhaps eight to ten more episodes. This approach uses the "event" promotion of a miniseries

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(for the first six to eight hours) to build the momentum needed to properly launch the series. If the series is picked up, they can use actors who would normally avoid a series for fear of finding themselves in a rut.

Finally, when asked if it's true that if one gets started in television, one is likely to end up staying in it, Hill said unequivocally that such a notion was not true. Hill cited the example of the young Steven Spielberg who continually refused to do anything like what he had done before. According to Hill, you're only as good as your ability to say "no."

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